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copies of the entered print job to be printed by the first network output device and each other output device.

It is an object of the invention to provide an output distribution method to allocate print jobs amongst plural output devices on a network according to the capabilities of each output device, referred to herein as dynamic performance determination.

This summary and objective of the invention are provided to enable quick comprehension of the nature of the invention. A more thorough understanding of the invention may be obtained by reference to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment of the invention in connection with the drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the dynamic performance determination method of the invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

As previously noted, a typical approach to solving the multiple output device problem is to have the master device, *i.e.*, the device which originally receives the print job, whether it be a copier, a printer, or a multi-functional peripheral (MFP), query each available output device on the network, *i.e.*, slave output device, for its pages per minute rating, then compute the number of copies to be done by each slave output device based on this information. Depending on the capabilities of each slave output device, this may or may not yield optimal results. The method of the invention more accurately assess the capabilities of the slave output devices and optimally ~~dividing~~ divides the number of copies to be made between the available slave output devices.

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In a networked digital output device environment, the capability of the slave output devices to print pages from an incoming digital data stream is an important consideration. The method disclosed herein provides a way of assessing slave output ~~devices~~ device's printing speed and then optimally distributing the number of copies to be made among the available slave output devices, and is referred to herein as dynamic performance determination. The method of the invention, depicted generally at 10 in Fig. 1, is intended to work with a master output device (MOD) 12, which is connected to a communications network 14. A number of other output devices (OODs), also referred to herein as slave output devices, are connected to network 14 in a tandem configuration. The method includes the following steps:

1. The operator begins a multi-copy job at the master output device, block 16.
2. The master output device scans and digitally stores an image for each page of the print job, block 18. Blocks 16 and 18 are referred to herein as entering a print job.
3. The master output device queries the network for available output devices (ODs) with the required capabilities for the job, such as duplex, stapling, collating, *etc*, block 20. The capabilities of an OD define its characteristics. It should be noted that the collective term OD includes the MOD and all capable OODs.
4. The master output device transmits the data, block 22, for the job to each available slave output device, block 24, that is capable of printing the job, *i.e.*, has the proper characteristics.
5. Each slave output device prints one copy of the job, block 26.
6. The slave output device may or may not be capable of storing the page image data and using it to print succeeding copies, and reports to master output device 12, block 28.